

25 OCT 1971

Approved For Release 2004/11/01 : CIA-RDP88-01350R000200750013-8

Johnson, Lyndon B.
Sec. 4.01.2 The Vantage
PointC. A. Helms, Richard
Orig. under
JohnsonBy Lyndon B. Johnson: *Withdrawal from the Race*

INSTALLMENT IX

Following is the ninth of 11 installments of excerpts from Lyndon Baines Johnson's memoirs of his Presidential years, which will be published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston on Nov. 1 under the title "The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969":

When I took the oath as President in January, 1965, to begin my first full term in office, I felt that it would be my last, and this feeling grew stronger with every passing week in the White House.

Two hospitalizations for surgery while I was in the White House had sharpened my apprehensions about my health. My heart attack of 1955 seemed well behind me, but I was conscious that it was part of the background of my life—just as I was conscious of my family's history of stroke and heart disease. I did not fear death so much as I feared disability. Whenever I walked through the Red Room and saw the portrait of Woodrow Wilson hanging there, I thought of him stretched out upstairs in the White House, powerless to move, with the machinery of the American Government in disarray around him. And I remembered Grandmother Johnson, who had had a stroke and stayed in a wheelchair throughout my childhood, unable even to move her hands or to speak so that she could be understood.

I have very strong feelings about work. When it is there to be done, I do it. And the work of the Presidency is demanding and unrelenting. It is always there to be done. Of all the 1,886 nights I was President, there were not many when I got to sleep before 1 or 2 A.M., and there were few mornings when I didn't wake up by 6 or 6:30. It became a question of how much the physical constitution could take. I frankly did not believe in 1968 that I could survive another four years of the long hours and unremitting tensions I had just gone through.

These were considerations I had lived with from the beginning. Others had developed in the course of events. On that last morning in March, as I moved

toward one of the most significant hours of my life, several factors relating to the state of the nation fed into the decisions I was preparing to announce. First, we faced the absolute necessity of an increase in taxes. For two years the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers had been stressing the need for a tax increase in the strongest terms. I knew that the stability of the dollar and the economic health of the nation and the world demanded an increase at the earliest possible time. I also knew that the likelihood of obtaining the necessary Republican votes to propel a tax bill through Congress, particularly in an election year, would be close to zero if I were a candidate. Second, we faced the possibility of new riots and turmoil in the cities.

Finally, there was the question of Vietnam. I had been preparing a speech on this subject to deliver to the American people late in March. I wanted to announce our new initiative for peace. If we were going to take the risk of a bombing pause, I felt I should make it clear that my decision had been made without political considerations.

For several years Lady Bird and I had spoken many times about our plans to leave the White House at the end of my first full term. Her position had remained perfectly clear and consistent since she had first expressed it to me in the spring of 1964: She did not want me to be a candidate in 1968. We discussed often how to select the proper time and the right occasion to make the announcement.

Long before I had settled on the proper forum to make my announcement, I told a number of people of my intention not to run again. As far back as the summer of 1965 I had discussed the subject with Willard Deason, whom I had known for many years.

A few months afterward, late in the fall of 1965, I confided in Arthur Krim. He and his wife, Mathilde, were loyal and devoted friends, and Arthur was a valued adviser on matters relating to the Democratic party. On this occasion we were discussing ways to reduce the Democratic National Committee's debt. I said that I regarded the debt as a personal one, to be paid before I left the Presidency. In the course of the conversation Arthur observed that a strong committee would be important to me in 1968. I told him then that I would not be running in 1968. Over the following years I repeated my decision to him many times.

I talked with John Connally early in 1967 at the LBJ Ranch. He was formulating plans of his own at the time. He told me that he had no desire to seek another term as Governor but that

he would run again if I wanted him on the ticket with me in Texas. I told him that I felt certain I would not run and suggested that he base his own decision on that assumption.

In September, 1967, I discussed the subject with another friend, George Christian, my press secretary. We were in Texas at the time, and I asked George to get Governor Connally's help in preparing a statement in which I could announce my decision. I thought then that I might find an appropriate occasion to use it later in the year.

I talked privately with both Dean Rusk and Bob McNamara, two of my most trusted advisers. At a meeting on Oct. 8, 1967, I again shared my thoughts with Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, and with several other top advisers who were present.

We had had a long session on the Middle East, nuclear planning, antiballistic missiles, Vietnam and other matters. I sat there wondering what the effect on these various pressing considerations would be if I were to announce my intention not to run for another term. Then I confided to the men assembled around the table the gist of my thinking. I told them that if I were announcing a decision at the moment, it would be not to stand for re-election.

In those final months, as the announcement of my decision neared, I believe only one thing could have changed my mind—an indication that the men in Vietnam would regard it as unfair or unwise. I asked General Westmoreland to come home in November, 1967, and I asked him what the effect on troop morale would be if I announced that I would not run for another term. Would the men think the Commander in Chief who sent them to the battlefield had let them down?

"Mr. President," he said, "I do not believe so."

Lady Bird had suggested March as the outside date for announcing my decision. March, 1968, proved to be exactly the right month for me for another reason: It coincided with the new effort I planned to seek the way to peace in Vietnam. I had found the right forum.

OUR daughter Lynda had been flying all night from California. She had just said good-by to her husband, who was leaving for duty in Vietnam. Mrs. Johnson and I got up early and were waiting at the south entrance of the White House to welcome her home.

Lynda had been reading about those demonstrators and critics who looked on such sacrifices as hers and Chuck's as meaningless or worse. The hurt that had been building up inside her was now

Continued